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Defining Bullying

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215,000. That is the number of students that have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine*. This sad statistic keeps growing every day in the United States. We often ask ourselves, “Why didn’t we see this coming?” or “Why did we ignore the warning signs?” These warning signs often stem from the highly normalized concept of bullying that runs wild in our school systems and across social media. Although this paper does not tackle the topic of school shootings, I believe that it can arm teachers with knowledge that can help stop these occurrences before they begin. I will be discussing the characteristics of bullies and the bullied and how to recognize them in your classroom. I think that it is important for educators to understand the basic definitions of bullying first. Then they should learn how to recognize bullies and the bullied in their classrooms or school.

I used several resources for this project one being the book “The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander” by Barbara Coloroso. I used this book for its pertinent definitions and guidance on how to recognize bullies. I also used my own first-hand experience at my place of employment, a daycare. I observed the children and took notes on their behavior during the summer of 2018. To ensure the safety of the children, I made sure that all observations were anonymous. My limitations for this project were limited observers and time limitations. Although I was the only observer for this study, I had a coworker review my observations to verify what I had observed, to take away some bias, and to make sure that I kept the children

anonymous. Time was a limitation, as well, because I was only with these children for about 8 hours a day. I did not observe what happens at home, school, or other environments. I brought these resources together to provide my audience with a comprehensive guide of who bullies, the bullied, and bystanders are and how to recognize them.

As an educator, I had always hoped I would never have to deal with bullying, however working at the daycare, as very much opened my eyes to it. I wanted to stop it, but I didn't know how. But after reading Coloroso's book, I realized that I had more knowledge of the subject. Bullying was defined as purposeful thought out activity intended to harm someone who is seen as inferior or unworthy of respect and concern. That much seemed short and to the point. In my mind there was a bully and a child who was being bullied. Stereotypically, there was a group of bullies that were seen as "jocks" or "cool kids" and the kid or kids being bullied were "nerds" or "weirdos".

Now I know that this is not the typical case. I had entirely forgotten a character that a child could play: the bystander. I use the words "role", "character", and "play" on purpose. Coloroso explained that one option was "...to use labels as identifiers of certain roles and the behavioral characteristics of those roles... intended to identify only a role that a child is performing at the moment..."(Coloroso, 2004). Children take on these roles during the bullying episodes as if they were acting in a play. It is simply a character that they are portraying. But if we start labeling a child as just a bully or just a bystander, they may never move out of that role.

During a young age, children try on all three roles randomly after witnessing others performing them. Eventually they find a role or even two that they keep for the rest of their lives. Some children become bullies after feeling the power of diminishing others. Some children become bullied and are the butt of all the jokes around them. Some children simply become

bystanders and watch passively as peers hurt each other. There are cases where children are bullied in some scenarios and then morph into the bully in a different scenario. As I said before, it is helpful to use these as labels and roles that children can take on. Hopefully, the roles can be discarded and children can break free from these characters and the cycles of bullying. Now that we have discussed these three roles, I would like to delve into them in further detail. The first role that I will discuss is the bully.

There is not one typical look or form of a bully, they can be anybody. Coloroso described in her book the four elements of bullying. The first is imbalance of power. Bullies can be older, bigger, stronger, and/or higher up on social ladder, etc. Also, bullies like to pull together a band of kids to create this imbalance. Intent to harm: The bully means to inflict some form of pain, whether it be physical or emotional and, takes pleasure in witnessing the hurt. The second is the threat of further aggression. The bully and the bullied know that the bullying probably will occur again. When bullying escalates, a fourth element is added: terror. This is used to intimidate and maintain dominance, struck in the heart of the child targeted is not only a means to an end, but is an end itself. There are other signs to look for when trying to identify a bully. Violence in movies and videos games are red flags. “86% of children between the ages of 12 and 15 got teased or bullied at school at least once” (Coloroso, 2004).

The most important topic, the bullied. The bullied come in all different forms. They can be boys, girls, tall, short, etc. The one thing they all have in common; they are singled out or targeted by a kid, or a group of kids, and become the recipient of physical, emotional, or any other form of aggression. The bully thinks that because the kid may be ‘different’ in some way, different in the eyes of the bully, that they not only deserved to be bullied, but the bully has a ‘right’ to bully them. “Kids who have behaviors that annoy or amuse their peers still have a right

to be treated with dignity and respect, just like anyone else” (Coloroso, 2004). Just because a kid may be different or unusual in some way, does not, and never will justify the bullying, everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

Many of us, myself included, have been on the receiving end of bullying. Kids learn to be bullies by how they are treated by the important people in their lives, typically their parents, the biggest and usually the most powerful people in their lives. “It is very difficult for people to believe the simple fact that every persecutor was once a victim. Yet it should be very obvious that someone who is allowed to feel free and strong from childhood does not have the need to humiliate another person” (Coloroso, 2004). Children who are bullied, sometimes put on a mask of normalcy in order to hide their emotions, hurt, and pain that bullies cause. Many kids who are bullied do not tell anyone about it, as they are scared that there will be repercussions from the bully.

Telling an adult, a parent, teacher, etc. is the smartest and safest way in order to deal with a bully. Many kids feel ashamed about being bullied. In particular, young boys feel that telling someone won’t fix anything and will only make it worse. “Boys are culturally inculcated with the idea that they are supposed to “take it,” “be strong,” and “go it alone,” in concert with “Don’t cry” and Don’t go running to Mama,” (Coloroso, 2004.) There are many signs that a kid is being bullied; refusing to go to school, taking a different route to or from school, grades steadily declining, does something out of character, has a loss in interests, etc. Any kid who shows one, or more of these signs should be talked to by a trusted adult, to see if they are a victim of bullying.

Many kids who are bullied keep it bottled up, as this is where the problem lays. “Tremendous shame brought on rejection and humiliation can drive kids to implode or explode”

(Coloroso, 2004). Almost two dozen teens in an American high school of up to eight hundred might be at risk for shooting other students. This can be a direct link from bullying as the kid or kids, may have taken as much bullying as they can, and think that going after their bully or bullies with guns will finally stop it from happening ever again.” “In a 2000 study done by the U.S. secret service, in over two-thirds of the thirty seven school shootings since 1974, the children who did the shootings all had been “persecuted, bullied, threatened, or injured” (Coloroso, 2004) There is a firm link between kids who are bullied, and school shootings.

There are many indicators to look out for, in order to tell whether or not a kid, can and/or will turn violent. The ‘code’ ranges from 5 to 55 points, with 5 being the kid may be at risk for juvenile behavior and 55 being the child and any immediate family are at risk, and the parents, should seek help from health services and/or law enforcement. Violence is never the answer when it comes to bullying. Knowing the signs of bullying, asking and talking to a child about whether they are being bullied can all help prevent these horrific shooting from happening.

“As parents, we must take the blinders off, think the unthinkable, and see what is happening in the painful downside of a generation that’s losing its way. Acts of violence are justifiable, but no matter how flat you make the pancake, it has two sides. The factors that led to this tragedy includes acts of both commission and omission. When students reject, isolate, and psychologically torture their classmates, these children, like wounded animals, will strike back: an act of commission. They have accountability, as do those who stand idly by and allow this infliction of pain: an act of omission” (Coloroso, 2004.)

The final and most pivotal role that I will discuss is the bystander. Bystanders play a very big role in bullying. They are the kids who see bullying going on, but don’t tell anyone about it. Why? They fear getting bullied themselves. They try to fly under the radar and avoid any

interaction, with the bully, or bullied. Whether they choose to look away, or join in on the bullying, they play a pivotal role in what is happening. “When kids observe the aggressive antisocial activities of a bully, they are most likely to imitate those activities if they see the bully as a popular, strong, and daring role model” (Coloroso, 2004.) It’s rather common for teen boys and girls to use some form of denigration on a bullied peer, in order to lift their own school social status. The kids who do stand-up when they see bullying happening are known as Defenders. “Defenders of the target-who dislike the bullying and help or try to help the one who is exposed-the target” (Coloroso, 2004.) Standing by and watching someone get bullied is never the right thing to do.

Bystanders don’t have any valid reasoning for not standing up against bullies. Unfortunately many kid have not been taught ways to help a target who is being bullied, or how to intervene when they witness. Far too many kids turn a blind eye to bullying. They want to speak up and help, but they either can’t, feel afraid, or don’t know how. “All too often these fears and lack of skill can turn into apathy-a potent friend of contempt. Contempt grows best in a climate of indifference. And contempt, is what bullying is about” (Coloroso, 2004.) While it may be scary or intimidating, it is the right thing to do. Children make far too many excuses why they can’t stop bullying when they witness it. Ignoring the problem doesn’t make it go away and in most cases, it only makes things worse.

“You can’t let people in need down. You can’t turn the back to people who need help”. (Daily, 2018.) Kids who are willing and want to stand up to bullying can be examples of how children should act, when they see injustice, like bullying happen before their eyes, and know stepping in, and speaking up, is not only the smart, but also the right thing to do. “When a whole

community is willing to say no to the tyranny of bullies, the cycle of violence can be broken.”
(Finn, 2018.)

Now that we fully understand these characteristics of bullying, how do we as educators identify bullying in our own classrooms. “The most obvious display of bullying is teasing and ridiculing other students. Bullies may be very open about it, or they may be extremely sneaky. They sometimes choose to instigate rather than act out the bullying; they may have their “followers” actually do their bullying for them.” (Finn, 2018.) There are seven different kinds of bullies: Confident, Social, Fully Armored, Hyperactive, Bullied Bully, Bunch of bullies, and Gang of Bullies, and although they may act differently than each other, they all have a few traits in common; spreading terror, a lack of empathy and/or remorse and a disregard for consequences.

Typically bullies are very outspoken or disruptive in class and they love and crave attention from their classmates and/or the teacher. The classroom should be a safe place for all student, teachers should make it their responsibility that students feel comfortable and able to talk to the teacher if they are being bullied. “Your first responsibility is creating a safe, healthy environment in your classroom – one that protects every single student from any harm, physical or emotional, as a result of the actions of other students. This means that you must identify any potential bullies and any potential victims and become a vigilant observer of their behaviors.”
(Daily, 2018)

These are some of the things we as educators should try to look out for if we think bullied child in our classroom. Since my employment at a daycare, I have observed the bully, the bullied, and the bystander. Most of the students transfer between the bully and the one receiving the bullying, but majority of the children in my class take on the roll of bystanders. First I will

discuss how I spot bullies in my classroom at the daycare. Second I will discuss how I spot children who are being bullied in my classroom. I believe that sharing my firsthand experience will help other faculty at the daycare recognize all three characteristics in their classrooms.

At the daycare the bullies tend to be the older school age kids, who see their bullying as just teasing the younger kids, typically about small stuff, such as being older and smarter, better at sports and/or games, etc. to them they think it's all fun and games. And often the bullying happens between the opposite sexes of children, the boys bullying the girls and vice versa. As I work with a few different sets of siblings, there is often sibling rivalry at the daycare, which usually includes teasing with each other, play fighting, etc. It is not bullying, and should not be defined or described as such. The biggest characteristic of bullying that I have seen at the daycare is emotional pain. One child, making fun of another in some way or form to hurt their feelings, put them down, or cause them to feel bad.

Physical bullying I observe far too often at the daycare, with many occurrences resolved quickly as many of the kids are fighting for small reasons, such as one child took another's toy, took their seat etc. and this appears in the form of grabbing or shoving other students, taking something from them, etc. Many of the kids do not want to apologize as they think they have done nothing wrong, at the daycare we punish them as soon as we see or hear that someone is bullying, in hopes to prevent it from happening again. At the daycare we also see verbal and relational bullying. Verbal happens with both the boys and girls.

With boys they tell the girls they have 'cooties' and try to keep away from them or call them 'bossy' while the girls usually call the younger girls losers, or tell them they aren't allowed to play with them, which makes it hard for kids to fit in, as they are sometimes shunned from social groups.

The threat of further aggression is always something we worry about, the best way to prevent it, is to firmly tell the bully, if he or she does it again, there will be more severe consequences. Almost all of the kids I am responsible for at the daycare are elementary school age, with one class middle school age. Typically the middle school age kids are the ones who tend to bully more, as they are older, have more of a sense of entitlement, think they are better, and deserve more than the other kids. We try to teach the kids the difference between teasing and taunting as some of the kids don't know that there is a difference. They are taught that teasing with your friends in a playful manner is Ok, while taunting in any form is not allowed as it is a form of bullying designed to hurt someone's feelings and it is not tolerated.

During observation I noticed the students who are bullied at the daycare tend to be; New kids in the class, pre-k kids who just moved into school age. They are known as the submissive kids. They usually have low self-confidence and will often accept the bullying and chose not to tell anyone about it. Physical attributes are often the source for bullying at the daycare. I have a student who shaved her head to show support for a family friend who was battling cancer, and a few of the students made fun of her for it, simply because she looked different. I have another student who uses hearing aids, and is sometimes taunted about it, because the kids don't understand why she needs to use them.

Like at many schools bullying happens at the daycare simply because a student is in the wrong place and wrong time. If a child is having a bad day, and they see a student who is playing with 'their' toy they might take it from them without asking or tell them to give it to them in a harsh manner, the student simply takes his anger/frustration on the student, and bully them without realizing what he or she is doing, and the other student, who is on the receiving end of it, is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Seeing how the bullied child responds to the

bullying, shows how they will handle it, in the future. Children handle bullying in a variety of ways. The bullied girls at the daycare tend to be more open about it, and will tell a teacher about it, as they want it to end, or want to know if they did something wrong. The Bullied boys, usually don't tell me or the staff about it, as they think they are just supposed to suck it up, take it and not cry about it, because that's not what boys are supposed to do. That couldn't be further from the truth and I reassure my students that if they think they are being bullied in any way that they should tell me immediately.

There are many instances of bullying that I have observed at the daycare. The one I see the most is, when a student follows me around and repeatedly asks if they can help me with anything, as they do not want to go back to the room and either play or eat lunch with the other students. This tells me one of two things. One, the student is being bullied by someone, and thinks if they avoid the other students they won't be bullied, and two, they are having trouble making friends, and don't want to either play or eat lunch by themselves. Whether it is either of these, I talk to the student and see what is bothering them, being bullied, and/or having trouble fitting in, and do my best to try and help them.

The Bystander plays possibly the biggest role in. When I see bullying at the daycare, I often see many bystanders who observe the bullying and do nothing to stop it, for fear of retaliation, or join in on the bullying. At the daycare many kids chose to join in on bullying when they witness it, they think if they see an older student doing it, they will seem cooler to them or will fit in better with them if they do it too. They seldomly speak out about it and more times than not, I don't know about bullying until I witness it first hand, and do my best to put an end to it immediately. The other daycare teachers and I have a zero tolerance for any kind of bullying and we reiterate over and over that bullying is never ok. What role do the bystanders play in

bullying? Are they just as much to blame as the actual bully? Whenever a student is a bystander in bullying, I firmly believe they have an obligation to speak up, and tell a trusted adult; parent, teacher, etc. about it. If they don't the cycle of bullying will just continue and more and more kids will end up getting hurt.

Let's say someone is being bullied, and are so ashamed of it, that they refuse to tell anyone about it, and hide it so well, that parents, teachers, etc. never know. This is the one thing we as teachers don't want to happen, because if bullies get away with that they are doing, they won't develop empathy or remorse. Their overall lack of guilt will lead them to continue to bully more and more people. As long as they know they can get away with it, they won't stop. They will continue to bully and even escalate what they are doing. In order to stop bullying, students and teachers must work together. Both teachers and students need to know how to spot a bully. Students must speak up when they see it, and teachers must implement strong consequences to bullying. With students and teachers working together, we can put a stop to bullying before it ever starts, as every child should feel safe, comfortable and happy when they go to school.

Conclusion:

By doing this project I expect to learn many valuable concepts about bullying that I will be able to apply in my future classroom. The first part of my project will be defining bullies, the bullied, and the bystanders that any teacher will find in their classrooms. The second part of my project will be going over how to recognize bullies. I believe that these two concepts will help me and anyone else who reads this project understand many of the bullying situations that they come across. I plan to share this knowledge with my coworkers to help them, as well. Knowing what the true definitions of bullying are and how to find bullies and bullied children can be a big stepping stone in helping the children caught in these situations. This project will be presented as

a written project. I will compile knowledge from the book along with my observations. These two sets of information will work hand-in-hand to explain bullying by using real life examples. The audience for this project will be my daycare staff. I am hoping to share what I learn from this project with my coworkers. I believe that giving them this information will help them identify bullying in their own classrooms.

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